It was deja vu for the Buckeyes.

Ohio State had an eight point lead over the Northwestern Wildcats late in the second half last night, much like their nine point lead against Wisconsin that eventually eroded into nothing in a loss to the Badgers Sunday evening. The Wildcats were slowly chipping away at the deficit before Northwestern's Alex Marcotulli drilled a deep 3-pointer that tied the game with seven seconds left.

On the road -- with the home crowd elated that their team was seconds away from forcing overtime against the No. 10 team in the country -- Ohio State's mental toughness was put to the test.

Thad Matta drew up play that had Craft advancing the ball up court against Northwestern's 1-3-1 full court press. Right before Craft hit midcourt, he lobbed a perfectly placed pass to Jared Sullinger on the low post. Sullinger turned, shot over his mismatched defender and kissed the ball off the glass to give Ohio State a two point lead with three second left. Northwestern's John Shurna would go on to barely miss a half-court heave as the Buckeyes escaped Evanston with a 75-73 victory.

Craft and Sullinger talked about the final play, "It was just get the ball to Jared and let him make a play. That's how we drew it up and I'm glad we were able to execute."

"Craft told me he was going to throw it to me," Sullinger said. "No ifs, ands or buts about it. He threw it to me and I made the shot."

Both teams were desperate for this win, and it showed. Ohio State was coming off its third loss in five games as questions about their chemistry and toughness grew. Northwestern is fighting to earn its first NCAA tournament bid in school history and their resume was in desperate need of a signature win. The Wildcats have lost a handful of heartbreakers at home this year and John Shurna was doing everything he could to win his last game in Evanston on senior night.

Jared Sullinger was just too big for the Wildcats to handle. Sullinger came out motivated -- fueled by his miserable eight point, six rebound performance against Wisconsin -- and scored 22 points with a game-high 18 rebounds against the Wildcats. In fact -- Sullinger collected as many rebounds as Northwestern's entire team last night.

Ohio State outrebounded Northwestern by 26 (44-18), a huge key to Ohio State's victory, and Sullinger talked about their effort to clean up the glass, "My games flows with [rebounding]. I haven't been rebounding as well as I did last year. We kind of played off the mismatches. Never been a part of something like that," he added. "We were determined."

Aaron Craft played a fantastic game offensively, hitting four of five 3-pointers on his way to 14 points. Both Craft and Lenzelle Smith, Jr., who scored 12 points with seven assists and six rebounds, provided Ohio State with an unexpected boost. It was their performance that helped the Buckeyes survive a hot Northwestern team that connected on 13 of their 27 3-pointers. Drew Crawford torched the Buckeyes, connecting on nine of his 11 shots for 23 points and John Shurna added 22 in 39 efficient minutes. It was a performance that would result in a win against most teams, but Ohio State did too many things right to lose the game.

"Disappointment," Shurna said after the game. "Kind of a tough way to go out,"

Ohio State dominated the first half. The Buckeyes came out and connected on their first six shots from the field, five of which came from the backcourt. Smith Jr. got off to a hot start, scoring five points with two rebounds and two assists in six minutes. Ohio State's ball movement on the perimeter was superb against Northwestern's zone, helping the Buckeyes hit eight of their first nine shot attempts.

The Wildcats were struggling to find the basket early -- namely John Shurna, who was playing his last game in Evanston on senior night. Shurna -- the leagues top scorer -- missed his first four shots from the field as the Buckeyes built a 22-13 lead.

The Buckeyes were dominating nearly every area of the game. Ohio State outrebounded Northwestern 22-5 in the first half, which helped the Buckeyes score 20 points in the paint. Sullinger was untouchable and scored 13 points and grabbed eight rebounds through 20 minutes against the Wildcats.

As both teams entered the locker room, Ohio State was shooting a blistering 59% from the field and had more offensive rebounds (seven) than Northwestern did total (five). The only thing the Buckeyes didn't do well was defend the 3-point line as the Wildcats shot 7-16 from behind the arch. That was the only thing keeping the game close as Ohio State entered halftime with a 39-29 lead.

Both teams went back and forth to start the second half before Ohio State stretched it out a bit with a 13 point lead. Northwestern stayed alive though -- fueled by incredible accuracy behind the arch, and cut Ohio State's lead to five points with under three minutes to play. The Buckeyes seemed to be crumbling under pressure down the stretch as Smith Jr. got called for traveling and Deshaun Thomas lost a rebound under the basket after bringing the ball down to low. Both turnovers turned into points for Northwestern, the latter resulting in Marcotulli's 3-pointer that tied the game at 73. That's when Craft ans Sullinger ended the game with their half-court hook up.

The Buckeyes will travel to East Lansing on Sunday for a showdown with league-leading Michigan State, and if Ohio State can avenge the 10-point loss they suffered to the Spartans earlier this season, they'll claim a share of the Big Ten regular season Championship.

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